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Viewpoints

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In God We Trust

Zula Bennington Greene

Peggy of the Flint Hills

Tomorrow Pittsburg State University is dedicating its new library. Gene DeGruson, librarian in charge of special collections, has an interesting story about a collection of papers recently received through the efforts of the Ruth W. Brown Committee.

Ruth Brown, born in Hiawatha late in the 1890s, became librarian at the Bartlesville, Okla., public library in 1920 and continued smoothly in that position for 30 years.

Then in 1950 she was fired by the mayor. Her offense was in refusing to remove magazines the mayor thought were subversive. The magazines were USSR Today, New Republic, Journal of Negro History, Commonwealth and Consumer Reports. These, the mayor thought, endangered the people of Bartlesville.

THE LIBRARY BOARD protested the firing, following which the mayor dissolved the board, wiped it out of existence. The case was taken to court and the judge decided in favor of the mayor. It was taken to a higher court,

with the same decision, and finally to the Oklahoma Supreme Court, which upheld the lower courts. That left Bartlesville without a library board or a librarian.

By that time the firing of Ruth Brown had become national news. Editorials denounced the disgraceful action in Oklahoma. Two young screen writers in Hollywood wrote a motion picture about the action, calling it "The Librarian," and cast Mary Pickford, many years retired, in the Ruth Brown role. After one day of shooting she left the cast — she had a clause in her contract that permitted her to do so.

THE ROLE WAS TAKEN OVER by Joan Crawford. It would be hard to find a greater contrast between two actresses than between Mary and Joan. Hate mail began coming in, which so depressed Joan that she left the role.

In the meantime the authors were having trouble. Both their producer and director had died. But in 1956 the scenario was again brought forth, this time under the name "Storm Center."

The location had been moved from Oklahoma to New England and the confrontation was not about magazines, but about a single book.

THE ROLE WAS GIVEN to Bette Davis, who completed the picture. Her hate mail was answered with a form letter saying that her children would be proud of her for playing the part of Ruth W. Brown.

Gene hoped that Bette Davis could be a special guest at the dedication and she was invited, but her schedule took her to Europe at this time.

WHAT HAPPENED TO RUTH BROWN? She went to Mississippi to teach biology at a small college for black students, and again was found too liberal. When she took her class on a field trip the complaint was made that she should have made two trips, one with the boys and the other with the girls. She died in 1976.

Gene began his collection of authors with a Haldeman-Julius room, in which he has assembled almost all the Little Blue Books published in the early years of the century at Girard. In many of them are the first publications of writers who later became internationally noted. He published them when nobody else would.